

Much of what is at present being done in the "Dance" segment of pop music - including Techno, House, Drum 'n' Bass etc. - can expect a proper and appropriate media response. But the hype that has accompanied the release of the first LP of those two Frenchmen Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo - together known as 'Daft Punk' - is surely unprecedented. From *Spex* to *Spiegel* one can agree with that, regarding this record. This is especially strange, as here we're not talking about beautiful and catchy music, but rather a raw and brutal bastard mixture of Techno, Disco, House and Punk. This is music that will fully capture you and leave you behind it, entangled on the dance floor or in your room. Reason enough to go and prod the two of them in the hopes that we might learn plenty about the secret of their success. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: '... go and prod the two of them' was '*den beiden mal auf den Zahn zu fühlen*' in the original; literally it means something 'feeling [their] teeth' but it is an idiomatic expression meaning 'to grill someone about/figure out something'.]

## Daft Punk



However, this was not so easy; because our Gauls were swarmed so badly as it were, having around thirty-five interviews to go to within the space of three days. Our interview was only possible because another journalistic nuisance cancelled on them. As we - with us was the disco specialist, Jan Joswig - arrived at the Berlin Virgin office, it was revealed to us that we wouldn't really have time for an interview. As Thomas and Guy-Manuel still had to make it for *Fritz!* for much of the same in Potsdam, we moved our question-and-answer game into the car as well. The three of us squeezed into the back seat of a Kombi - Jan was sitting in the passenger seat - and amidst the congestion in the Berliner Stadtautobahn and later in the freer flow of the AVUS we were able to lure out a significant amount of information from Thomas. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: '*Kombi*' is a term for a Volkswagen Type 2 van. '*Berliner Stadtautobahn*' is literally the 'Berlin city autobahn', probably referring to *Bundesautobahn 100/A100* as that's part of the route leading to Potsdam. The AVUS, '*Automobil-Verkehrs- und Übungsstraße*', is a controlled-access highway that forms the northern part of the *Bundesautobahn 115/A115* which leads to Potsdam, so taking the traffic congestion into account I believe most of this interview must have taken place over 1hr-1hr30mins whilst in Berlin. Normal Berlin-Potsdam travel time is roughly 40-50mins.] Guy-Manuel dozed throughout almost the whole journey and opened the window frequently. Only very rarely was he involved in the conversation; first there was the obligatory question of their first project, a guitar band.

**Thomas:** "We only lasted six months. Only a year later we continued on with other equipment, that time we had precise ideas about what we wanted to do then."

The band, founded in 1992, was called *Darlin'* and brought out a song on a Duophonic compilation (remember, the label of *Stereolab!*). Some British music magazine [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: referring to *Melody Maker*] dismissed the band with the label 'daft punk'; it certainly didn't sound very nice but it seemed the right name for the next project-to-be. There was a lot of playing with self-irony right there.

**Thomas:** "Rock was a little boring for us. And we at the time had started to go to clubs; that was what was really interesting, the music and then the energy, that had it all. But that doesn't mean we reject rock as a whole. For us, it's just more interesting to make electronic music. But there are still interesting things, always."

As if to confirm this, Thomas shows off a Ween button on the sleeve of his jacket. The two wacky 'brothers' also appear, consequently, on the lavish list of thanks on *Homework*. It'd made their record label equal to the influences of those two!

**Thomas:** "These are all things that we love and respect but that doesn't necessarily mean a 'direct influence'. We like many types of music. *The Clash*, for example. They can't really be classified properly. Was that punk? But they've made some funky stuff, too."

**Guy-Manuel:** "We love each stuff... not kitsch stuff!" [**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:** oh my god guy-man *what* you can't english]

*"What about Pierre Henry and others from the Musique concrète genre?"*

**Thomas:** "I know that 'Rollin' & Scratchin' sounds like something from Pierre Henry. What he was doing, though, we didn't know until much later. So this isn't a copy of that. We don't know a lot of things, we're not so well-versed."

*"And early-eighties electronica like Lio, Mathematic Moderne or Elli & Jacno, are they an influence?"*

**Guy-Manuel** (suddenly becoming quite cheerful!): "We don't know them, that was underground at the time."

**Thomas:** "They are better known in Germany than to us. Often one tends to take things from other countries as rather more authentic, than from their own country. One tends to discover this often from childhood, slowly - at that time we were more interested in American music."

There followed a discussion about punk, disco and techno! But back to the music of Daft Punk. It positively jumps in one's face. Just one song like 'Rollin' & Scratchin' - housed right in the middle of the record - is so brutal in its sound, already similar to being noise. But somehow these sounds are always fitted into the rhythm, thus always becoming dance beats; by all means it's not what you'd call classical dance music. And to those who're more accustomed to the usual Eurodance [**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:** exact term used here is '*Kirmestechno*'/'funfair-techno', a pejorative term for Eurodance in general as a lot of it was played during fairs] it is something rather unsettling. For many of the songs sound overly-stretched, too weird, too hard; of course, we were very interested in how those unusual songs were worked on.

**Thomas:** "We always work in a pair. Together we sit in the studio and put our ideas together. There is no plan. So we tend to try to work against the rules, what we do is more of a coincidence... maybe sometimes an accident... We mainly use the mixer and sampler, there are several ways to go about it. There are so many things that you can do with a sampler."

*"You sometimes work as DJs, though, do you take records to sample?"*

**Thomas:** "We don't take as many records. Rather, we sample sounds, such as from drum machines. Or we sample a finished song."

*"And how long do you sit on those pieces? But that should all go pretty fast."*

**Thomas:** "It all depends. Sometimes it only takes a few hours; or we sit for a few weeks over a song. There's no single formula, we like spontaneous things. The rough mix, we do with a four-track mixer but we don't use overdubbing (to clarify: there are no tracks superimposed on a tape but everything is mixed at the same time). At the end it's all mixed on eight tracks.

Maybe that's why the sound is so rough and direct.

Soon, at the Berlinale, one will also be able to see a French film where 'Scratchin' and Rollin' appears [**TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:** typo? The song title was printed that way]. 'Clubbed to Death' is about a young woman who ends up at a club in the Parisian suburbs and the consequences that follow thereof.

**Thomas:** "This is a small independent film. They asked us to use the song before the whole hype began, but we've only seen twenty minutes of it."

The money from their major deal was immediately plugged into its own independent infrastructure. A small studio was set up; Thomas started his own record label, *Roulé*; the two have their own production company with *Daft Tracks*.

**Thomas:** "We now want to help others, just as we were supported by them previously. The scene in Paris is expanding enormously. The next interesting project is *Air*, a lot of it will be coming in the near future."

Only the clarification of why Thomas and Guy-Manuel had no real photos of themselves remained at the end. They prefer to hide their faces behind masks.

**Thomas:** "We won't engage in the normal rockstar business... The music should be in the foreground, not us."

So far this seems to have worked out; the hysteria so far revolves around the music, and because of that there are oodles of interviews that the two must be giving.

- *Translated by Kimbk*